

Purple loosestrife
(*Lythrum salicaria*, *Lythrum virgatum*)

Currently in Montana, noxious weed infest about 8.2 million acres. Many of these state listed noxious weeds were brought to America as ornamentals for gardens, medicinal purposes, by accident in discarded soil from a ship's ballast, or unintentionally in bags of seed brought from other parts of the world. Whatever the cause of introduction non-native plant species have found their way onto Montana's state listed noxious weed list.

Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*, *Lythrum virgatum*) is native to Europe, Asia northwest Africa and southeastern Australia. This plant was introduced into North America in the 1800's as an ornamental. Purple loosestrife was used as a folk remedy to treat a variety of medical problems including sores and ulcers. Purple loosestrife inhabits seasonal wetlands, wet meadows, river and stream banks, the edges of ponds, reservoirs, ditches, irrigation canals and marshes. Purple loosestrife has a unique four sided stem that can grow up to 5' tall, and is green to purple in color. Lanceolate leaves with smooth margins clasp the stem and are heart-shaped or rounded at the base. Both the stem and the leaves are covered with downy fine hairs. In the fall after the seeds have set, the whole plant turns red in color and then fades to brown about 2 weeks later. The flowers of purple loosestrife are purple to bright magenta and are clustered on a long spike called a raceme. Each flower has 5 to 7 petals and blooms from June to September. Pollination occurs by insects that have long tongues, such as bees and butterflies. The plant sets seeds from July to August, and when the seeds are mature the pod containing the tiny brown teardrop shaped seeds, bursts open. Each raceme of this plant is able to produce about 3 million seeds per year. Purple loosestrife has an extensive root system consisting of a taproot and many short rhizomes that form a large mass. This extensive root system can interrupt water flow in streams and clog irrigation canals. Purple loosestrife is a dangerous invader due to the fact that it pushes out all native vegetation such as cattails, therefore displacing the wildlife that relies on these species to build their nests.

Please take a few moments to learn about noxious weeds. If noxious weeds are not currently a problem in your area, they may be in the near future. For more information about Montana's state listed noxious weeds, regulated plants, or weed species listed on your county weed list, please contact your local county weed district (can list weed district name here... ex: Lewis & Clark County Weed District) at (406) (Phone number). Or you can contact the Montana Department of Agriculture at (406) 444-5600.